



Michigan Citizens for Prison Reform

P.O. Box 80414 Lansing, MI 48908, Phone: 269-339-0606

www.micpr.org | Citizensforprisonreform@yahoo.com

Honorable Commerce Committee Members:

I am here today regarding SB 374, the "Michigan Student Safety Act".

My concerns with this bill, that have our Attorney General implementing this program, are many. I am wondering why we would even have interest in putting such a program in front of the current Attorney General, who clearly feels we are not locking up enough people?

This program, if set up and run in a meaningful way, could assist in resolving and mediating many issues within schools prior to crises occurring. I believe the more appropriate agency to run such a program would be the Resolution and Mediation Centers within Counties, under SCAO <http://courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/OfficesPrograms/ODR/Pages/default.aspx>

At a training, I recently learned Michigan is mandated to be implementing and utilizing Restorative Justice Practices within our schools, and there is a state employee to be overseeing this. I currently have not seen that is being implemented widely or put into practice. There are small pockets of schools who are utilizing it. Please see the attached articles.

I recently attended a training in restorative justice practices in Detroit, and met a few school staff from Washtenaw County who are utilizing restorative circles with very young children, teaching them best ways to resolve differences and problems that arise, and utilizing victim-offender conferencing and circles to solve problems before they arise. They are training youth and teenagers to be leaders in these practices. These are life-long skills that the youth will take with them into adulthood and is evidence based, showing phenomenal results where utilized. Washtenaw County has found it to be very effective, stopping fights before they occur, and creating a more peaceful environment. I previously knew that there are some Lansing schools who are also participating. We need a bill to mandate that every school implement restorative justice teachings as part of their curriculum.

Currently, even with the recommended amendments, this bill will most certainly funnel children into the legal system. Our police are not trained to deal with children's

behavioral or emotional issues, children are impulsive and often play pranks that could quickly lead them into the court system. Things that you and I once did as youngsters, how would get us a juvenile record, especially with this bill in place. This is very alarming to me, when our goals have been to work against juveniles winding up enmeshed in the system.

I hope you will consider what is truly best for children; utilizing resolution, mediation and restorative justice practices is something we should be working to implement, not police involvement. I believe this bill needs to be tabled, studied further, and research done on the above mentioned practices and approaches prior to making a costly decision.

I work for the Association for Children's Mental Health, and as you likely know, I was a founding member of Citizens for Prison Reform. I have experience myself how quickly a child/youth can become enmeshed in this court system that does not provide the necessary helps they need.

I have attached two documents from Michigan that support my concerns.

Sincerely,

Lois DeMott